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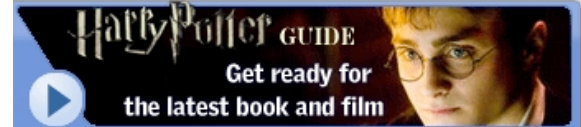
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## Living within the community

Affordable housing tops the state's goals for those with disabilities

By *BETH MILLER, The News Journal*

Posted Wednesday, July 18, 2007

DOVER -- It just so happens that Earline Bessix's No. 1 wish for Delaware also is at the top of the list of priorities for the Governor's Commission on Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities.



Earline Bessix, who has cognitive and physical disabilities, lives in a Dover mobile home. She wishes more people like her could live in the broader community. [\(Buy photo\)](#)

The News Journal/BOB HERBERT

"My wish is that people like me could be more independent and have their own houses," said Bessix, who lives in a mobile home in Dover.

Bessix, who has cognitive and physical disabilities, has such housing thanks to support from her church and The Arc of Delaware, a nonprofit organization that assists those with cognitive disabilities.

But many do not.

Affordable housing for people with disabilities tops the goals listed in a five-year strategic plan released Tuesday by Gov. Ruth Ann Minner and the commission.

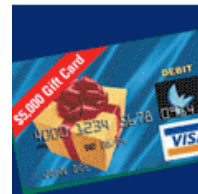
"A Path Forward" maps out specific objectives and timelines for 10 goals adopted by the 19-member commission, which was formed in 2002 to help the state comply with a Supreme Court ruling that requires states to have a plan to allow people with disabilities to live in the most integrated, least-restrictive setting possible.

To do that, community supports must be in place.

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"We do not want to isolate people with disabilities in the community," said Rita Landgraf, who co-chairs the commission with Vincent Meconi, state secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services. "As we move forward, additional goals and objectives will be addressed."

Lawmakers and Gov. Ruth Ann Minner addressed two of the 10 goals in the budget for fiscal 2008, providing about \$600,000 to start a Money Follows the Person program and a Medicaid Buy-In program. The former makes it possible for an individual to determine how to use his or her government subsidies to get the best support, and the latter allows someone who is eligible for Medicaid benefits to work full time without losing that eligibility.

Meconi said Minner has provided more money for programs that benefit people with disabilities than any other Delaware governor.

Officials say they aren't sure how many people might benefit from the plan set forward Tuesday, but Andrea Guest, of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, estimated that "hundreds" could take advantage of the Medicaid Buy-In program.

"The return on the investment is enormous," Guest said. "These people will be paying taxes, becoming consumers."

One of the goals is to build a database that would better quantify the number of residents with disabilities and the services they need.

Another goal is to identify 20 people each year who are living in long-term-care facilities but want to live in the community and could do so with the proper support.

"We've been working on this for a long time -- 10 years, in some capacity -- and many of us wondered if anything positive would ever come forward," said Doyle Robbins, executive director of the Delaware Association of Rehabilitation Facilities. "We've been trying to get better services in the least restrictive environment. This commission has played an important role."

With a five-year plan, new databases to inform decisions, and stronger ways to communicate between public and private agencies, commission members expressed confidence that progress toward providing better supports for community living would continue.

It is a hope Bessix shares.

"To me, it's important," she said. "I love to live in the community. I love to help people. It's important."

Contact Beth Miller at 324-2784 or [bmiller@delawareonline.com](mailto:bmiller@delawareonline.com).

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